

BROOKLINE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Human Services Subcommittee
Report on FY2021 Budget
Veterans' Services

The Human Services Subcommittee held a public hearing on the FY 2021 budget of the Veterans' Services Department on Tuesday, March 3, 2020 at 7:30 PM in Town Hall, room 214.

Attendees included Veterans' Services department head William McGroarty; Assistant Town Administrator Justin Casanova-Davis; Advisory Committee member Neil Gordon (TMM 1); and Human Services Subcommittee members Harry Bohrs (TMM 3), David-Marc Goldstein (TMM 8), Kim Smith (TMM 6), and Claire Stampfer (TMM 5).

FY21 Budget:

The FY21 budget request represents a negligible \$613 (0.18%) increase over the FY20 budget. Personnel costs, which account for 51.59% of the total budget, essentially remain flat.¹ There are 2.0 FTEs, including a director, who also serves as emergency preparation coordinator, and an assistant. As in the FY20 budget, there is \$26,154 allotted for internships for veterans, which pay about \$14.50 per hour for part-time temporary work. The "Other" cost category, which accounts for 47.24% of the total, consists mainly of veterans' benefits (\$144.6K), along with funds (\$18.5K) to commemorate Memorial and Veterans Days, both level funded for FY21. There is a \$250 (71.43%) increase for "Other Travel" for staff training. The "Services" and "Budget Capital" categories include printer and copier leases, as well as leased computer equipment, respectively. The revenue primarily includes reimbursement from the state 115 benefit program and fluctuates over time.

Program Costs - Department of Health & Human Services					
Expenditure Class	FY19 Actual	FY20 Budget	FY21 Budget	FY20-21 \$ Δ	FY20-21 % Δ
Salaries	170,322	178,991	178,854	-137	-0.08%
Services	2,375	2,388	2,388	0	0.00%
Supplies	1,230	650	1,150	500	76.92%
Other	31,006	163,535	163,785	250	0.15%
Utilities	0	0	0	0	0.00%
Budgeted Capital	459	510	510	0	0.00%
Total	205,392	346,074	346,687	613	0.18%
Revenue	117,974	83,618	66,228	-17,390	-20.80%

Discussion

The department, as mandated by state law,² assists eligible veterans and their families with financial and medical assistance, and receives reimbursement for 75% of approved benefit expenditures. It also helps veterans obtain benefits

¹ Permanent staff salaries increase by \$216 (0.15%), and overtime pay decreases by \$353 (41.38%), leading to an overall decrease of \$137 (0.08%).

² Massachusetts General Laws, M.G.L. ch. 115.

from the Veterans Administration (VA) and other federal programs. Mr. McGroarty's efforts to serve Brookline's veterans are well known, as is his ability to connect with those experiencing the effects of PTSD. He referred to a current situation in which a local veteran suffered a stroke, and the department is providing financial support until he is able to qualify for disability benefits. The department helps veterans navigate the Veterans Administrative system to move up waitlists and expedite their receipt of health care. Mr. McGroarty recently became certified as a national Veterans Service Officer, which affords him on-site access to the Veterans Administration's computer system. Thus, he is now certified at both national and state levels. He assists veterans to obtain the maximum level of benefits for which they qualify and accompanies them to appeal benefit applications that are denied or "lowballed".

Last year, the Subcommittee heard about \$100,000 that was left to the department from the widow of a veteran whom it had assisted. The estate has since been settled, and the funds were placed into a special account. To date, the department has used the funds to buy office equipment and also plans to purchase a used lift-equipped van and to refurbish the Civil War Monument.

The aforementioned internship program, which provides part-time work on a temporary basis for veterans who are in school or searching for jobs, also benefits the worker and the Town as efforts are made to place interns in departments that are relevant to their careers.

It was noted that the department provides administrative and office supply support to the Office of Disability, Inclusion, and Community Relations (ODICR). The group discussed the feasibility of getting a better accounting of such expenses to reflect the respective departments' actual expenses. The department "live[s] at public health", and thus its budget does not include utilities costs contained in other budgets.

Mr. McGroarty noted that he and his associate, Claudia Leone, do not usually attend professional association meetings; however, there were some "more pertinent" ones on obtaining veterans benefits and other topics in which they were interested.

As for community activities, Mr. McGroarty worked with the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) to coordinate POST Underground jazz nights that occur on Fridays in the basement of VFW Post, which has become a community gathering place for music and food.

A detailed description of FY2020 accomplishments and FY2021 objectives appears on pages IV-85 and IV-86 of the FY2021 Financial Plan.

Recommendation:

The Subcommittee voted 4-0-0 to approve the FY2021 budget of \$346,687.